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Non-reciprocated Pleasure: The Important Distinction between Emotional and Expressive Labour in Hospitality

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Title: Non-reciprocated Pleasure: The Important Distinction between Emotional and Expressive Labour in Hospitality

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Abstract:

A gift is something freely given to another, with the implicit expectation of bringing pleasure. Although a gift can be either an object (such as a piece of cake) or an experience (such as a picnic with a friend), if there is a personal interaction between the giver and recipient, another more subtle gift is created. This subtle gift lies in the embodied expressions of pleasure shown by the giver and receiver as the gift is received, and is predicated on the assumption that the gift will bring pleasure to the receiver. The gift is therefore spontaneously reciprocated, and both giver and receiver experience pleasure simultaneously.

When this occurs in a business transaction, such as when pouring wine for a paying guest, the server may feign pleasure, but may also respond authentically to the guest's displays of pleasure. This changes what may have been emotional labour to expressive labour, because a genuine desire to please is rewarded with expressions of pleasure. Without this, the 'gift' is merely something that passes from one person to another without any need for emotional response. This occurs, for example, when a tool is handed to someone who needs it; there is no expectation of pleasure, as it is merely supplying a need. This is not a gift, but a transaction, and occurs when a so-called gift is actually a predictive expectation, such as the receipt of a gift voucher from a retailer for accrued expenditure.

This paper examines different permutations of gratuitous and commercial hospitality, to determine the difference between transactions and gifts, and why this difference is important for hospitality servers. Data from a study of motivations for giving hospitality help illustrate the role of pleasure in gifts of hospitality, and the nature of expressive labour.